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Another plea for  
agriculture

[London?]

1906

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Another plea for agriculture, by one of the  
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**Another Plea**  
— for —  
**Agriculture.**



1908

**By One of the People.**

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ANOTHER  
PLEA  
FOR  
AGRICULTURE.

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BY ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

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1906.

## PREFACE.

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JUST a year ago I printed and distributed a small pamphlet entitled "A Plea for Agriculture," in the hope that it might, with other cognate works on the subject, do something to turn attention to certain legislative measures which are essential in the interests of the commonwealth.

The last Parliamentary Session was not particularly rich in useful domestic legislation, but it is to be hoped that ensuing sessions will witness, among other things, the earnest consideration of the agricultural needs of the country, and the passing of such laws as will place the great agricultural industry in as prosperous a condition as it is in France, Germany, and other European countries.

To deprive a country of its agriculture is to deprive the people of the best and surest way of earning a living. An economic condition of this nature is as fatal as it is unnecessary, and demands the prompt consideration of Parliament.

This small supplementary paper is therefore sent out in the hope that it may be of some use in helping to bring about those changes in the land tenures of the country which are necessary before the people can derive full advantage of their great domestic industry, agriculture.



## CHAPTER I.

### SOME RESULTS OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM.

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IN my "Plea for Agriculture" I maintained that, although the great agricultural industry of the country was in a languishing condition, it was not beyond hope; it was moribund, not dead; it was capable of being restored to strong, healthy life by the application of prompt, invigorating remedies.

I pointed out, in Chapter IV., how certain remedies might be made use of. Before going further into the consideration of these and other remedial measures, let us look further into the results of our present system—the results of our present land-laws. If we find that they are not framed in a way that will ensure the best possible results all round, to the landlord, tenant and people, then obviously they have failed in the purpose for which they were intended. The only real test of the efficiency of a thing is its results; and if we ask the question, "Have our land-laws resulted in the greatest good to the community at large, to the country?" the reply is No! Firmly and unequivocally, No!

If the system of land tenures had been workable and up-to-date, there would be in evidence a healthy, widespread agricultural industry, affording employment to all, and providing within the shores of our own country practically the whole of that vast quantity of food stuffs and other

provisions which we so foolishly purchase from foreign producers. At the present time we are importing annually as much as £35,000,000 worth of dairy produce, butter, cheese and eggs; and double that amount in value of imported grain and flour; and if we look into the neglected potentialities of our own agricultural industry, we shall begin to realise how much of this annual expenditure might be saved to us if the land were held and worked under proper conditions.

The case against our present system can be put in a nutshell. From the national standpoint it is as bad as it can be, because a great industry, capable of affording work to all the unemployed and producing enormous quantities of food for the people, has been simply lost to the country, a capital loss in agricultural wealth represented by various writers at from £1,000,000,000 to £1,400,000,000 during the last thirty years. From the tenant farmer's point of view, matters could hardly be worse; they can barely make a living out of their holdings; while from the landlord's standpoint it is as bad a system as could well be devised. Income from land has enormously fallen off and many estates are hardly worth the having.

The impoverishment which has overtaken many of our landowners owing to the hopeless condition of the entire agricultural question has forced them to dispose of their estates on the best terms obtainable. There is no standard whereby land can be valued according to its agricultural worth; it has to go to the highest bidder, who is almost invariably a rich man who wants it avowedly for *Sporting* purposes, and whose object is to possess a place where he can entertain his friends after the gaieties of the London season. If you glance at any of the Estate Agents' catalogues, or question the Agents themselves, you will find that in the case of nearly every one of the hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of splendid agricultural properties that are sold annually, more stress is laid on their *sporting* than their *agricultural* value.

England is a free country, and gold is a mighty power; there is nothing to prevent the whole of the land being bought up in the course of time and converted into sporting estates

and deer forests. So long as the land is put to its proper use, it does not matter whether it belongs to A. or B., to a rich man or a poor man; but the point is that, under the present system, *agricultural* England is disappearing, with the certain result that in time we shall have only a *hunting, shooting, and fishing* England.

Your rich "sporting" landlord doesn't care very much whether his "little sporting estate" is cultivated or not. He buys it avowedly *for sport*, and if his two or three hundred, or thousand, acres do not let, what does it matter? He is rich enough, anyway, to stand that small amount of loss.

It is a sad thing to stand by and watch this terribly wasteful process going on year by year, to witness the base uses to which such vast areas of valuable agricultural land are put.

The land is, and must be, the most valuable asset of any country, even of a commercial country like Great Britain. Agriculture is essentially the inheritance of the people; in its many forms it is so woven and interwoven with their interests and lives, that the country which neglects it neglects the people, and deserves extinction as a great power.

We have, as a nation, so seriously handicapped ourselves by neglecting the land that it is impossible to maintain our position in the race with those competitors who, recognizing that in this lies their great wealth, and the surest and best means of providing food and employment for the people, work it for all it is worth, and continually replenish their power and vigour from those sources of stimulation which are ever to be found in agriculture.

When we opened our corn markets to the world sixty years ago, it was to meet a want and right a wrong; there was need for reform in the Corn Laws, and relief came when they were repealed. It was right that the people should have cheap food, but it was wrong to leave the chief industry of the country to languish for want of further legislation to compensate for the inevitable difficulties which farmers immediately began to experience in competing with foreign corn-growers. If the repealed laws had so changed the economic condition of agriculture as to render the successful maintenance of the

industry impossible under the then-existing land tenures, it is perfectly obvious that a change in these land-laws, or the system under which the agricultural industry of the country had been administered, became a necessity. The need for change has, indeed, become more apparent yearly; but though many Governments have come and gone since that crisis, not one of them has ever brought this vital question into the arena of public work. They have all adopted a policy of drift.

The result is that Great Britain, with her boasted wealth and civilization, her boundless Empire, "on which the sun never sets," her splendid institutions, her popular education, and great free press, has nevertheless contrived to encompass, in the administration of her own agricultural affairs at least, an economic system at once unsound and unnatural.

With enormous individual wealth on the one hand, as a result of trade and manufactures, we have, on the other hand, endless and widespread poverty as a result of lack of work in the agricultural industry. Manufacturing, commerce, shop-keeping, are absolutely essential in the economy of nations, but to enjoy full prosperity something more is wanted. These industries, in themselves, are incapable of giving work to more than a certain percentage of the population, and because we have no agriculture, worthy the name, the rest must starve, or sink to that hopeless condition of want and distress from which spring most of our national evils—drunkenness, vice and crime.

We spend enormous sums of money in trying to combat these evils. Let us improve the position of the people by all means, especially in the great towns. But if we give them better houses to live in, let us give them work wherewith to pay the rent. And if the State educates the children of the poor, it must find them employment in the end, or they will be no better off than before. All effort will be in vain that stops short of affording the people the one thing essential to human existence—the means to ensure their daily bread.

At present this is the one thing we seem unable to do. In this respect, despite all our apparent prosperity, our masses

are worse off than in any country in Europe, with perhaps the exception of Russia. There is only one explanation of this anomalous position, and that is

### BECAUSE WE NEGLECT OUR LAND!

Fifty years and more of bitter experience have proved the truth of this; we may wriggle and turn, protest and declaim; writers and speakers by the score may try to prove that the condition of the moment is but the result of economic laws, and that it will in time change for the better; and by this means the unwary may be deceived; but the *plain, unvarnished facts* about this vital question will nevertheless remain as they are here set down, and all the subtleness and sophistical jugglery in the world cannot alter them.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE CASE FOR SMALL HOLDINGS.

#### STATISTICAL COMPARISON WITH FRANCE.

IN my "Plea," Chapter III, pp. 51-62, I pointed out how the millions of acres of splendid agricultural land now lying untilled and unproductive in Great Britain might be brought under cultivation so as to afford general employment for the people.

We might now deal with the matter from another point of view, viz., that of Small Holdings, just to ascertain if the land is likely to become and remain as valuable a *National Asset* under this system, as under the one suggested in the "Plea."

In France, Belgium, and other countries, as well as Germany, where successful agriculture is carried on, it is found that the land produces *maximum* results where the small farm system prevails. Further, under this system agriculture has, from a national point of view, become the greatest source of strength which a country can possess. Take France, in particular, whose agricultural industry is one of the most successful and flourishing which the world has ever seen. At an important crisis in the history of that country, the value and stability of her rural industries were put to the severest tests of national

disaster. When war with Germany had destroyed her trade and manufactures, enormously burdened her revenues, and apparently sapped the very life-blood of the state, she showed one of the most remarkable instances of national recuperative energy known to history.

The stupendous war-indemnity was paid almost without appreciable effort, and the country regained its wonted prosperity with a celerity so phenomenal as to astonish the nations.

It was Agriculture which proved the mainstay of the nation. That was too firmly established and interwoven with the lives of the people for even war to uproot and destroy. When governments were swept away and anarchy rampant, the country—agricultural France—remained steadfast and resourceful, and came to the rescue the moment the iron grip of the conqueror was relaxed. Without her agriculture, France would have been smitten to the dust and crushed, nor could she have risen from her humiliating position for many years, perhaps never.

What would be *our* position under similar circumstances? With our great export and import trade cut off, our manufactures overthrown, with our food supplies exhausted, no internal means of recuperation, and no external hope of aid, what should *we* do? England, with her wealth and prosperity, built only on the more or less unstable basis of trade and manufactures, with no agriculture, worthy the name, to give her a solid foundation of *internal* strength, would fall to pieces like a house of cards. Vast individual and national wealth there may be, but her people could not live on gold if no food were forthcoming. Hers would be the inevitable destiny of a country which sacrifices its essential and national means of support—agriculture. These are facts which ought never to be ignored—war to Great Britain, sooner or later, is an event which certainly comes under the head of probabilities, and we should therefore look this question squarely in the face and not attempt to shirk it.

A short statistical comparison of the agricultural industry of France with that of this country will do much to illustrate our weakness in this direction.



The following table is compiled from the "Statesman's Year Book," 1905 :—

	United Kingdom	France.
Total area (acres) ....	77,109,000	132,506,513
Crops, all kinds .....	19,056,309=25%	74,322,724=57%
Meadows and permanent pasture .....	18,099,691=24%	17,010,707=12%
Grazing land, hills and heaths .....	23,412,000=30%	
Woods .....	3,038,000=3.9%	20,730,913=15%

From this table we gather that France has 57 per cent. of her total area under crops, against our 25 per cent. In respect to pasturage we have, including grazing lands on hills and heaths, 54 per cent., while France has only 12 per cent. But quite irrespective of these facts, France supports eight and a quarter millions of dairy cows to our two and three quarter millions, and seven and a half million swine against our two and a half million, on a much smaller area of land devoted to these purposes, *and in spite of the fact that live stock is supposed to be the British Farmer's forte.*

The French farmer never devotes an acre of good land to pasturage which is capable of being cultivated to a better profit. Under his small holdings system, he gets out of his land the largest return that it is capable of yielding. Here is what a careful student of the question\* says on the subject, writing in one of the London papers last August :—

"The French peasant farmer to a large extent grows his own food. His methods differ with the climate and the soil, but speaking generally, he produces his own milk and butter, his cheese and his bacon, his garden produce and his fruit, and sometimes the flour wherewith to make his bread. Indeed, he does more, he exports his produce to other countries, and very largely to ours. On the other hand, the peasant farmers of England, like the larger occupiers of land in general, purchase almost all they require for their tables—butter and bacon from Denmark, cheese from our colonies, fruit from Canada, beef from the United States, and mutton from New Zealand."

\* Professor James Long.

Now when it is suggested that the French system might, with advantage, be applied to England, your political economist says "Ah! what applies to France won't do here because the British farmer can buy his food cheaper in the open market than he can produce it, while the conditions of the two countries differ considerably."

In one respect it may be admitted that conditions *do* differ. Our farmers cannot *export* the enormous quantities of produce which continental farmers do, owing to hostile tariffs. Indeed, the entire question of foreign tariffs is unquestionably inimical to us in many ways, and until we put ourselves in a position to neutralize their influence we shall continue to suffer. Meantime, there are fortunately good *local* markets where our farmers can find a ready offtake for produce grown in excess of their own individual needs. So long as there is an offtake, and a good one, it matters little whether we export our surplus productions or dispose of them in our own country.

In every other respect we are really in as good or even a better position than the French farmer.

The agricultural value of land (the rental value, say) is far higher in France than it is with us, and this is an important point in our favour to start with.

The soil of France is not, *per se*, richer than ours. Generally speaking, the Continent does not possess finer agricultural land than we do. The French peasant farmer, living on his small holding, puts more into his land than we do with our system of big farms; where, however, really good farming is practised, our land produces as much, acre for acre, as the French.

The pasturage in France is, on the whole, not so rich as ours, and although in France the farmer does not rely so much on pasturage for his dairy produce as we do, yet it is admitted that good grass is an important factor where the production of milk is concerned, quite irrespective of the area that may be set aside for the purpose; and this fact constitutes another advantage in our favour.

In respect to climate, there is little in it either way. Northern France is hardly better off than we are, while in

the South the climate, though excellent for vine culture, olives and flowers, is not so favourable as ours is for the growth of the kind of products we are considering.

Looking at the question from these points of view, we may fairly conclude that we are, at the outset, just as well equipped with the essentials to success as our neighbours across the Channel.

That we do *not* succeed as well as our neighbours argues that there is something lacking in our administration, something wrong in our system agricultural, something clumsy and faulty with our manipulation of the entire question.

With the needful reform in our land-laws, and the adoption of better methods generally, there is no doubt that we could build up that large class of small proprietors or lessees who would be able to support themselves and their families on the land as they do in other countries. This class should, under proper conditions, constitute the backbone of the nation. The system is calculated to produce a self-supporting, self-reliant, and free type of citizen, and this, from the national point of view, is one of the greatest desiderata of our times.

Put a man in the position of supporting himself and his family on a small farm, watch his development and progress, and we shall learn a good deal more than any political economist's manual can teach us; indeed we shall come to conclusions that will be altogether subversive of the most cherished theories of that cult.

The business of this man is to live, and to live as well as circumstances will admit of, regardless of the question of whether he is working strictly in accordance with the laws of economics. He sometimes reads learned treatises on that subject, wherein it is laid down that it is contrary to economic Law to produce anything for yourself if you can buy it cheaper from others. But he finds that his little farm produces most of his food supplies, milk, butter, cheese, bacon, poultry, fruit and vegetables, and that with the proceeds of his surplus productions he is enabled to purchase the remainder of life's necessities, and this fact, which is pregnant with significance, is worth more to him than any amount of theory. He may,

indeed, agree with the theory of the thing, but he simply cannot afford to accept it in practice. This he leaves to those who are able to air their views in the public prints regardless of personal financial considerations. He himself has got his family to support, and only his land to support it with, and if his small farm enables him to do this he is content to leave the question of political economy out of his consideration.

His position, in short, is similar to that of the street vendor of home-made matches, for example, who, even if he be persuaded that it is uneconomic to support his family by this means, because matches can be produced more cheaply abroad, is hardly likely to let his living go on the strength of a theory of that kind. Political economists may hurl their polemics at his head, they may tell him everything his farm produces can be bought cheaper in the market, that all he does is subversive of the laws of economics, but the single, simple fact that by this means he is able to support himself and his family is quite enough for him, and he accordingly works out his destiny in his own eminently sensible, practical way, and remains altogether uninfluenced by what political economists tell him.

We may take it for granted that if the agriculturist could have more scope to work out his own salvation on these simple practical lines, the whole problem would be speedily solved, so that even political economists would have nothing left to say against the resuscitation of our rural industry. In agriculture, as in all other vocations, the essentials to success are thrift, energy and industriousness, and a man may live on these where he would starve on the theories and principles taught by political economists. Given the opportunity, hard and intelligent workers are bound to succeed in agriculture, and succeed, on the whole, better than they would in many other callings that are open in the big centres of population, where competition is keen, and the struggle for life harder than it would be on the land. We cannot ensure to every individual the possession of that industry and intelligence without which a man will go under in any calling, but we can, as a nation, do more than we are doing to provide the needful opportunity.



### CHAPTER III.

#### OUR POSITION COMPARED WITH GERMANY.

#### SOME COMPARATIVE STATISTICS.

WE have already seen the results of a statistical comparison of the Agriculture of this country with that of France. Here is a similar table compiled from the same source, showing how the United Kingdom compares with Germany in the same respects :—

	United Kingdom.	Germany.
Total area (acres) ....	77,109,000	133,530,018
Crops, all kinds .....	19,056,309=25%	65,188,531=49%
Meadows and permanent pasture .....	18,099,691=24%	21,397,298=15%
Grazing lands on hills and heaths .....	23,412,000=30%	
Woods .....	3,038,000=3.9%	34,569,796=25%

The lamentable fact is disclosed that of the total area of the United Kingdom only one-fourth is under actual cultivation, while Germany has half its area under crops.

But this mere statement of fact, favourable though it be to Germany, does not represent the entire position, because Germany has as much as 34½ millions of acres under " Woods

and Forests," or about one-fourth of the total area of the country, whereas we have only 3 millions, or one twenty-sixth part.

At first sight this would seem rather a disadvantage than otherwise, and so it is in a sense, as forests cannot, in the nature of things, yield as much per acre, or support the same head of population, as arable land. But as Germany finds it necessary for many reasons to maintain her forests, she has tackled this phase of the agricultural question, as she has all others, intelligently, and from a strictly utilitarian standpoint, and she makes her forests pay.

Here is what the " Statesman's Year-Book " says on the subject :—

" Forestry in Germany is an industry of great importance, conducted under the care of the State on scientific methods. . . . From forests and domains alone Prussia receives a revenue of about four million sterling."

What is the case with us ? Are our forests a source of revenue or are they a source of loss ? Do they support the greatest head of population that woods and forests are capable of supporting, or are they run on the same principle as the rest of our land—wastefully ? These questions can only be answered in the same way we are obliged to reply to all questions of a similar nature in regard to land. The State has neglected its forests as it has every other part of its great land-industry, and the people are the sufferers.

Take the New Forest, for example, and with the exception of a few small enclosures here and there planted with Scotch firs—perhaps the least remunerative of that class of tree—we shall find the whole area of from 70,000 to 80,000 acres unproductive. There are, it is true, many spots of exquisite beauty to be found in the Forest, and nobody would ask for or wish for the destruction of those grand old trees which are a source of pleasure alike to the strict utilitarian and the artist ; but utilitarianism need not altogether be sacrificed to beauty. Have your forests by all means, but make them of some use. Let them produce the maximum of revenue, and in doing this you will be giving employment to the

maximum number of people that forestry is capable of. Let us regard our woods and forests as they do in Germany, as

"an industry of great importance, conducted under the care of the State on scientific methods."

In this connection this much is certain, that if we are obliged to maintain our woods and forests and do not run them to the best advantage, loss of profit means loss of revenue and a proportionate rise of rates and taxes, in *some* form or other, to compensate for State maladministration.

Let us look at the above table from other points of view. The chief fact that strikes us is that we, out of a total area of 77,000,000 acres of some of the finest arable land in the world, have actually 41,000,000 acres in permanent pasturage and grazing lands on low hills and heaths. Now it is an ascertained fact that practically the whole of the land that is set aside for pasturage is of the best in the kingdom, rich, fat, and wonderfully productive, and yet this, alas! is devoted to a branch of agriculture, or to a system of agriculture, which is as wasteful as it is unnecessary.

Germany has a total grazing area of 8,662,874 hectares, or 21,397,298 acres, against our 41,501,691 acres, and yet with her small and necessarily limited area of pasture she manages to produce and maintain a far greater number of domestic animals of all kinds than we do, in spite of the fact that we make a speciality of grazing and cattle rearing, and "go in for it," as we term it, because we say it pays better than arable farming.

Here is a table compiled from the same source, showing the head of live stock for every 100 acres of pasturage in the United Kingdom and in Germany:—

In the United Kingdom a total grazing acreage of 41,501,691 supports:

Horses,	2,092,499,	or	5	per	100	acres.
Cattle,	10,535,484,	"	25	"	"	"
Sheep,	29,035,062,	"	68	"	"	"
Pigs,	4,177,167,	"	10	"	"	"

In Germany a total grazing area of 8,662,874 hectares—21,397,298 acres—supports:

Horses,	4,195,361	or	19	per	100	acres.
Cattle,	18,939,692,	"	88	"	"	"
Sheep,	9,692,501,	"	45	"	"	"
Pigs,	16,807,014,	"	78	"	"	"
Goats,	3,266,977,	"	15	"	"	"

This shows that Germany produces four times as many horses, more than three times as many cattle, eight times as many pigs, and nearly as many sheep, acre for acre of the land devoted to grazing purposes, as we do in Great Britain and Ireland.

Now of all the damaging, damning evidence that can possibly be brought against the utter worthlessness of our agricultural system, this is surely the worse. Here we have further clear, unmistakable proof, set before us year by year in unemotional statistical works of reference, that we are shamefully beaten by a neighbouring state in the *one* branch of the great agricultural industry in which he lay ourselves out to excel, which fact in itself surely forms a sweeping, condemnatory indictment against our wasteful and futile methods.

Europe, recognizing that she has not the limitless grazing areas at her command which are to be found, for example, in some of our great colonies, and the States of South America, wisely restricts her cattle-growing operations to certain limits. Her rich arable land pays better to cultivate than to graze, and, as a rule, only low-lying or waste land is devoted to pasturage. Yet in spite of this fact Europe succeeds in rearing enormous numbers of cattle. Cows pay better than steers, and perhaps four-fifths of the cattle reared in many of the European states are milkers.

In Holland, where the land is nearly all water-logged, the people have built up a great industry by devoting the land to the only thing it is suited for,—grazing; and they have done it wisely, and with due regard to the principles of strict utilitarianism. They leave the raising of large herds of steers

to those countries which possess prairies and pampas and almost limitless areas of grazing land, and because they know that a given area of grass land will only support a certain number of cattle, they go in for cow-rearing almost exclusively, for out of this a vast number of people may be supported, while the growing of beef merely supports the grower and the butcher. The Dutch farmers regard the growing of cattle for food purposes as the most wasteful, unfruitful system of farming that could possibly be devised, and they leave it alone.

The United Kingdom is the only country in the world which has followed the topsy-turvy plan of turning her rich arable land into pasturage; and then, singularly enough, adopting a system of cattle and sheep rearing which is the most wasteful and unproductive in the world, and the least suited to the needs of a small country where every acre should be utilized to its utmost capacity in support of the people. The English farmer resorts to this thriftless, senseless method because it is said to be *the one* thing that pays best; and this fact alone affords overwhelming evidence of the degeneracy of the present system, and the hopeless condition of the entire industry.

Let us hope that the necessary reforms in our agricultural system will be undertaken in a manner that will offer sure guarantees to the people that, in this as in all other respects, the industry will be placed on a very different footing from that disclosed by these shameful and disconcerting facts.



#### CHAPTER IV.

### THE UNNECESSARY MIDDLEMAN AND OTHER ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS.

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ONE of the most sweeping indictments against our agricultural system may be based on the want of touch between grower and consumer. What is the use of growing good and cheap produce, we say, if we can't get it into the consumer's hands without the interference of a lot of go-betweens?

In Germany and other continental countries the consumer buys agricultural produce direct from the grower. Large markets are established in all towns and villages where the peasant farmers will be found offering their produce for sale. The charges made for the use of these markets is either purely nominal or nil.

In Great Britain, the grower, having got his produce to town, and paid the tolls levied by the private owner of the market, puts it into the hands of a salesman, who expects from 5 per cent. to 7½ per cent. for his services. This wholesale salesman has to pay enormous rentals for his premises in such markets as Covent Garden, for example, and the retailer who buys the produce from him, is hardly better off in the matter of shop-rents. The big profits necessitated by this

condition of affairs have, of course, to be made both at the expense of the grower and the public who buy the produce. Let us see, roughly, how it works out to the detriment of both. Take a couple of well-known articles of food, potatoes and apples, for example.

At the present time, October, 1906, potatoes are being harvested and put on the market. Market prices for the better kinds range from 45s. to 75s. per ton, while the price to the ordinary middle-class shopping public for a good class potato, is, say, 14 to 16lbs. for 1s., which is at a rate of 160s. or 140s. per ton. This shows an enormous profit of from 113 per cent to 211 per cent., at a time of harvest and plentiful supply.

Or take the rates ruling in a lower class of London trade. The retailer sells the cheapest kind of potato (Blacklands) at a halfpenny per lb, or £4 13s. 4d. per ton, for which he paid £1 17s. 6d., showing a gross profit of no less than £2 15s. 10d. per ton, or 150 per cent.

Now let us take apples. The wholesale price of these varies from 3s. to 10s. per bushel. The weight of a bushel varies considerably, from 40lbs. to 52 or 53lbs., according to the size and kind of the apples; but if we take the rates in the shops, from 2d. or 3d. per lb. for "cookers," to 6d. per lb. for pippins, we shall easily see the scale on which profits are made on these commodities.

These figures show that there is an enormous profit of from 177 per cent. to 243 per cent. swallowed up by the middlemen, at harvest time, when markets are full and there is plenty in every direction. The mere passing of agricultural produce from the field to the kitchen causes the price to rise close on 250 per cent. in the course of a few hours or days—in just that period of time, in other words, that it takes to bring the produce in from country to town.

Under no system of trading could the colossal profits here depicted be justified, not even in the hazardous business of a fashionable money-lender, who often lends money on the precarious security of a dissipated spendthrift; but when they are made out of the *food of the people*, it becomes a matter of grave import.

There is hardly a grain of truth in the plea that, the greengrocer's wares being of a perishable nature, he must charge two or three times the price the producer obtains. Every housewife knows that his wares, consisting as they do chiefly of the common vegetables or of fruits, are *not* of a perishable nature. Besides which, there is never any necessity for him to carry heavy stocks. He knows what his daily sale of cabbages, potatoes, and the rest of it is, and he buys just to suit his requirements; his business is of the hand-to-hand order, and the wholesale market is always available with full supplies of every commodity he deals in.

The fact that a greengrocer, with a capital so small as to be of little use in any other calling, can, with enterprise and industry, speedily wax fat and prosperous, argues a lack of proportion in the greengrocery business which is simply inimical to public interests.

In a fairly poor locality, a man with a capital of £20 can rent a shop and start business. There is always a certain class of people who are attracted by the last new shop, irrespective of the kind of goods dealt in, and all that is wanted on the shopkeeper's part, to begin with, is the faintest shade of a reduction in prices. This common trade "dodge" at once ensures a certain amount of custom, and your £20 capitalist finds that he is able to hold his own. The quick realization of large profits, however small the daily takings, enables this man of slender means to rapidly increase the scope of his operations, and in a short time he blossoms forth as a successful greengrocer and fruiterer, with his trade carts darting here and there through the town, and other evidences of prosperity in every direction.

Given sufficient business, the greengrocer is bound to grow rich, out of all proportion to his risks and his ridiculously small capital; if he does not do so, it is because excessive competition naturally narrows the limits of his operations. That the business is at least good enough to attract many competitors is proved by the fact that in any ordinary town more greengrocers' and fruiterers' shops are to be found than any other class.

There is seemingly nothing wrong with this little picture of an honest man's success ; indeed, it seems a commendable example of industriousness. It is the system which is at fault ; the system offers the man his chance, and he would be a fool if he failed to take it. Like other traders, he works for a profit, and the biggest profit obtainable. But these huge profits are made at the expense both of the agriculturist and the general consumer, and the question becomes of more than passing interest, for it impinges on two of the most difficult problems of the day, the struggles of the agriculturist and the poverty of the people, in whose interests no effort should be spared to supersede the system by a better and more equitable one.

Bring the grower into direct touch with the consumer, and obviously both would be considerably benefited, as the entire question would then be placed on an intelligible basis of supply and demand. The consumer would always reap the full benefit of plentiful supplies. At present, as we have seen, at the very time of harvest he has to pay prices which put enormous profits into the pockets of the middlemen.

What is wanted is a proper system of municipal markets in every town and village in the country. The stalls should be had for merely nominal rents, and every facility put in the way of producers by actively encouraging the inflow of all farm and dairy produce. Let the thing be as well and intelligently done as it is in other countries in Europe, and both the farmer and the British housewife will soon see in which direction lies their interests. Under such a system, no thrifty housewife would ever think of buying her butter, eggs, milk, fruits and vegetables at the shops, where she would, in some instances, have to pay twice or thrice the price, and then not always get fresh produce.

Coupled with reform in this direction, there should be given every possible facility for the expeditious and easy transit of all kinds of agricultural produce throughout the length and breadth of the land. It is not enough to leave this to Railway Companies and the farmers, because half-a-century of effort has not resulted in anything but an inadequate and inefficient

system. State aid is essential here if the matter is to be placed on a workable basis ; otherwise no relief will be forthcoming.

Space will not admit of an exhaustive discussion of this phase of the many-sided agricultural question, but it will be desirable to say a few words on the necessity for combination.

Lack of combination on the part of the farmers has always prevented them from assuming a strong position with Railway Companies, and until they are in a position to demand the most favourable terms possible, carrying charges are sure to be against them.

Not only should farmers combine, but the State should step in and arrange a system with all railway companies whereby agricultural produce would be carried over all the lines at very low rates, nominal rates even. This is one direction in which State aid is essential, and it should no longer be withheld.

Then, again, this regrettable lack of combination has always prevented the agricultural industry from assuming that position in Parliament which it is its undoubted right to hold.

It is shown elsewhere that, in spite of its languishing condition, agriculture is by far the largest and most important industry in the Empire to-day, and yet the political influence of its representatives—the farmers—is hardly felt in the House.

With reference hereto I will merely quote again an extract from Mr. O. Eltzbacher's article, referred to in my "Plea," p. 46 :

"The whole of the agricultural population of Germany is organized in enormous political associations, Farmers' Associations and Peasant's Societies, which have about a million members. Through these large associations the agricultural interest of Germany exercises some considerable influence in the Imperial Parliaments and in the various local Parliaments of Germany, whilst in England, the classical land of political organization, agriculture is politically inarticulate, and therefore, neglected, an unknown factor, a plaything, and a victim of the political parties and the local authorities, without a friend, without an advocate, and without a champion.

Had it not been for the powerful combination of all the agriculturists and for the determined agitation of their representatives in Parliament, the rural industries of Germany would certainly not have obtained the powerful fiscal protection which they enjoy under the new tariff."

And of this we may be sure, that, without a powerful combination of those engaged in agriculture in this country, there is positively no hope that more will be done by Parliament in the future to put the industry on a satisfactory basis than has been done in the past. You may have a Minister of Agriculture who really has the agricultural interests of the country at heart, and who may be desirous of improving matters, but what can he do unaided ? He is after all only one among a number of other Government officials, and unless he could be strongly backed up by that political power which properly organized agricultural associations would, without doubt, result in, his voice would lack weight in the councils of the Government.

Despite the terrible neglect which agriculture has met with during the last half-century, there are nevertheless two and a quarter million people actually at work on the soil, *nearly double the number employed in all the textile fabric industries in the Kingdom*, for example. And yet there is less combination, less practical co-operation, and less cohesion in the great agricultural industry than there is in the minor industries of the country. This is a terribly anomalous position for a great national industry to be in, and both the Governments of the past, and those engaged in the industry, deserve a well merited reproach for a state of affairs which is nothing but a scandal and a standing disgrace to the country.



## CHAPTER V.

### FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS.

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It has been asked by the most timid among the students of this "Back to the Land" question: where are the workers coming from if you bring back into cultivation all the land in the United Kingdom that is capable of being tilled ?

This is quite a judicious question to ask. In seeking a reasonable working system of land tenures, whereby all useless and inequitable restrictions may be removed and our land workers freed from all impediments, let us be sure that we shall have no difficulty in finding capable, thrifty workers, prepared to settle on the land and work it intelligently, and in sufficient numbers to undertake the gigantic task of bringing under a high state of cultivation that enormous area that is now lying practically waste.

The obvious answer to such questions is, the workers will be there when the work is ready for them.

Take the cycle and motor manufacturing industry, for example, and we shall find that, while in 1881 there were only 1086 workers engaged in the trade, in twenty years the number had increased to 33,356, a difference of over 3,000 per cent.



There are upwards of 2,260,000 people working at agriculture to-day; increase the facilities, and in a few years we shall have four or six times the number. We need have no fears in regard to the supply of workers once the land tenures are of a nature to attract them. We shall have some failures, without doubt, as some who take up agriculture as a pursuit will be unfitted for the work by their life and habits, but then, on the other hand, it is well known that there are numerous failures to be met with in many other pursuits besides agriculture. We can't have our omelette without breaking eggs, and we can't set up a sound, practical agricultural system without encountering *some* failures.

In this connection we have only to take into consideration two important factors in our modern life to enable us to realize the vast economic benefits which would accrue from a real attempt to bring the land back into cultivation. The first of these factors is the unemployed question, and the second, emigration.

The unemployed problem is not only still with us, but has become *the* burning question of the day. In spite of the sixteen to twenty millions or so of the public funds that are spent annually on pauper relief, the ground of the difficulty remains untouched, and sick and tired as we are of the whole thing, we really don't know how to rid ourselves of the problem in a reasonable, common-sense, practical way. The burden has already become intolerable, and until we realize that agriculture is the only industry capable of affording employment to the mass of the people who are in such sore straits to-day, nothing will be done to minimize the evil.

Then again, we have to consider the baneful effect on the manhood of the nation of the constant drain by emigration. During the five years ending 1905, upwards of 1,100,000 souls emigrated from the shores of Great Britain, excluding Ireland. When we bear in mind that it is the hardy and industrious ones who emigrate, and the weak and timid who stay behind, it is easy to understand what a terrible drain on the strength and vigour of the nation must be continually going on through this wasting process.

What ought to have been done in the true interests of Empire was to have made the *Mother Country* strong by carefully conserving all her sources of strength, building up all her industries, and neglecting none.

Instead of this, we have thrown out of cultivation millions after millions of acres of land, and with them we have thrown out of employment a proportionate number of people. Instead of manipulating all our great resources, so that the maximum population would have been maintained in our own country, we have expected our towns to support both urban and rural populations, which they are as incapable of doing in this as in any other country in Europe.

Having by this means naturally found our population somewhat congested and difficult to provide for, it has pleased us in our folly to believe that Great Britain was feeling the burden of over-population, and we have fallen into the false and fatal habit of encouraging emigration.

There is not a man too many in this country, nor is there a section of the community that we cannot support. The cry about "over-population," "congested towns," and the rest of it, is mostly sheer nonsense, with hardly a grain of sense or truth in it. Bring the land back again under the plough, and you will absorb all your so-called surplus population, and attract back to his native land many a good man who was constrained to leave his own country for lack of work.

If you tie a man's hands behind his back and throw him into the water, you cannot expect him to swim, and if you deprive several millions of people of their land, you cannot expect them to make a living. They must either starve or emigrate; in our case they do both.

So long as our Politicians, our Statesmen, our Governments, and all those who are interested in the Unemployed and cognate subjects, leave out of account the forty odd millions of acres of land that are lying practically idle in this unfortunate country, all effort to relieve the position must necessarily be in vain.

When it is known that a farm of ten acres or less, properly tilled and intelligently managed, will support

a man and his wife and a child or two, it is a matter of easy calculation to show that if the whole, or even one-half, of that enormous fertile area which is now lying untilled were brought under cultivation, profitable employment would be found for seven to fifteen millions of people.

The question is a simple one. On the one hand we have millions of acres of land lying untilled and unproductive, and on the other hand we have millions of workers who would be only too eager to seize the opportunity, if the State would adopt an attitude of sympathy and support, by framing wise legislative measures, and co-operating with the people in their struggle to get back to the land.

Mr. C. F. G. Masterman, in a series of articles recently contributed to the "Daily News," has, among numerous other writers on the subject, done good work in showing what a real and widespread "land-hunger" has caught hold of the people, and how, even under the existing unsuitable conditions, an enterprising, thrifty man may make a comfortable living out of such small holdings as are represented by *four to ten* acres.

Let us, however, not forget for a moment that "one drop won't make an ocean," and that these instances quoted by Mr. Masterman, though valuable in themselves as showing how capable the land is of being worked at a profit, are, nevertheless, but isolated cases of possibilities.

You may find a landlord here and there willing to do what Lord Carrington has done on his Lincolnshire property, but these cases must be regarded as exceptions rather than the rule. The fact is that the present system of land tenures is altogether too insecure, too risky to admit of the tenant farmer embarking on an agricultural career with a fair amount of certainty as to success. Looking at the matter broadly, it may be taken as certain that, under the present condition of affairs, if there is a general, widespread demand for small holdings, or moderate sized farms, a demand, mark you, that is *real* and *abiding*, up will go the value of land, and high rents and short leases will be the rule, and the reverse of this the exception.

It is easy enough to see what would be the immediate result of such an unfortunate condition of things; bona fide cultivators of the soil would at once see the hopelessness of the situation, and would drop agriculture like a hot coal, and this momentous question would be thrown back for another decade or so.

There should be land laws under which a man may rent his land at reasonable rates, and work it for a term of years sufficiently long to enable him to make a decent living out of it, and get a fair return for what he has put into it.

Then there should be certain well-defined provisions under which a man might acquire his small holding or his farm by purchase, provisions that would be fair alike to landlord and tenant. Thrift, enterprise, and industry should be rewarded by giving a man the right of becoming a small proprietor, and once you create this class of cultivator you have advanced one step towards the most successful and prosperous form of agriculture that any country can have.

It is urged by some that, in spite of the splendid chance that was given to Ireland in 1903, when the Irish Land Act became law, no appreciable change for the good is noticeable in the agricultural position of that country. This may be, and I believe is true generally; but then no comparison, in this respect, at least, can be drawn between Ireland and England.

In the first place, the ordinary Irish peasant farmer is more of a politician than a ploughman, and no inconsiderable part of his time is taken up in discussing with his compeers, in convenient centres in village or town, the political topics of the day. His ardent temperament invests every question with undue importance, and in his burning zeal he consumes far more time than he can afford, valuable time which, if devoted to his farm, would produce totally different results.

Then it cannot be denied that the Irish farmer is not altogether a free agent in matters spiritual, and he is frequently constrained to do that which he is told to do, in the temporal world, rather than that which common-sense tells him he

ought to do. He is held on one side by politics, and on the other by the Church, and between the two he does not make a good farmer.

In England our agriculturists are neither in the grip of politics nor under the thrall of the Church; they may discuss both the one and the other, but they do not allow such matters to interfere with their work. Give them an industry and they become thrifty and industrious, and desirous of making the most of their opportunities.

With us the *system* is wrong, not the man. Successful agriculture is generally impossible under the present unsuitable land tenures, and other unfavourable conditions which environ the industry, and we simply ask that they may be amended and so altered as to give every British subject the chance of working the land in a manner that will enable him to make a living out of it.

This is pre-eminently a question for the State itself to take up. With such pregnant facts before their notice, why in their effort to relieve to some extent the intolerable pressure which has resulted from the Poor, the Unemployed, and cognate problems, do they consistently leave out of consideration the main factor in the entire position—Agriculture? Why do Governments, the Press, and the numerous writers on Political Economy, leave severely alone the question of drastically purging our land-laws and our agricultural system generally from those abuses and infirmities which impede healthy action?

The answer to these questions is, because of *vested interests*. We know we cannot give to the country a set of laws that would bring under cultivation every acre of land in the United Kingdom that is capable of cultivation, without trampling on many tender corns, and we are afraid to take the step. Among other things every tie on the land in the shape of tythes and land-taxes would have to be swept away, so that it would be freed of all burdens save the rent, and we are afraid to do this and give the country a system of land tenures based on a solid foundation of practical commonsense commerciality; afraid, in other words, of applying our

boasted free trade principles to the land because of somebody's vested interests.

These vested interests bar the way to many a needed reform, and being a conservative people we are naturally reluctant to tackle them. It is true that the necessity for reform is now being urged on every hand, and even Government seems pledged to *some* sort of action. At the Annual Conference of the North Eastern Agricultural Federation at Newcastle-on-Tyne, on the 13th October, the President of the Board of Agriculture, speaking in reference to a resolution declaring the necessity of a revision of the rating system, "so that the excessive burden on land may be reduced," is reported to have stated that "Government was pledged to deal with the question on an early day."

But this deals with only one side of a big question, and we are hardly justified in believing that any real relief is going to come out of a promise of the kind. Governments have never been famous for introducing into the legislature any measures of genuine reform in relation to land in Great Britain, the experiences of the past fifty years afford ample proof of this, and we have no reason to believe that the present Government will be any exception to the rule. It is likely that, if they did bring in a Bill dealing with the revival of the agricultural industry, it would be such a half-hearted, paltry, inefficient measure as to be of no real use in solving the most difficult social and economic problem of the day.

Any Government can gain cheap notoriety by bringing in some kind of an Agricultural Holdings Bill whereby perhaps 100,000 acres or so would be taken up; and to the casual observer the problem would seem to have been solved. The newspapers would be full of the "enormous benefits to the country of the new act," etc., and the unwary public would really believe that the difficulties of the agricultural question had been fully met.

The country does not want a bill that, at the most, will offer meretricious aid where strong and reliable support is essential. There is ample evidence on all sides to prove that even a little encouragement from State or Landlord is suffi-

cient to induce agriculturists to take an interest in the land and to give a little stimulating fillip to the industry. But this is not enough ; any legislative measures that offer but adventitious aid will result in the main question being thrown back for an indefinite period ; and the last state of this unfortunate industry would be worst than the first.

What is wanted is an intelligible, comprehensive, and practical system of land tenures, whereby deserving and industrious citizens may, on reasonable terms, acquire agricultural holdings of from ten say, up to fifty acres, and such a scheme could easily be accomplished by the present Government at an early date.

In spite of the disappointment of the past, there is a widespread hope throughout the country that the cry

### "BACK TO THE LAND AGAIN!"

which has been uttered the last few years by all sorts and conditions of men, may not have been uttered in vain.

Great things are expected of the Royal Commission which is now sitting to study the unemployed and kindred questions ; let us hope that those entrusted with the matter may find a way out of the difficulty ; but this much is certain, that if the suggested remedies leave out of the question the cultivation of the soil, *the complete and perfect cultivation of every acre of land in the United Kingdom capable of bearing crops*, any scheme they may bring forward is foredoomed to failure.



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